

Washington, DC – Tomorrow, February 19, 2005, marks 63 years since President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 forcing 120,000 Japanese Americans into internment camps during World War II.

I congratulate all the organizers and events that are taking place on Day of Remembrance. For those who have experienced the internment camps firsthand, as I did, this Day of Remembrance serves as a day to educate the public about the lessons learned from the internment and provides an opportunity for all people to reflect on the importance of justice and civil liberties during times of uncertainty.

Those who were interned remember all too clearly the temporary quarters at racetracks and fairgrounds and the more permanent “relocation centers” in desolate areas, where Japanese Americans were surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by military police.

Despite being detained as loyal American citizens who posed no threat to this country, we were never bitter. We must continue to pass and share the experience to future generations and advocate for social justice.

Although the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 passed Congress and was signed into law by President Reagan – providing reparations and a formal apology from the U.S. government to those held in internment camps – there is much more to do. We cannot stop with the Civil Liberties Act, because we are still not free from discrimination and social injustice in our communities.

Japanese Americans were not the only targeted group during World War II; Italian Americans and German Americans also faced restrictions on their freedom and civil liberties. So on this Day of Remembrance, we must pledge to spread awareness and stand together to oppose discrimination in the name of national security, while keeping our story alive to serve as a lesson.